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By J. B. ATKIN

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NATIONAL PHYSICAL EDUCATION.

Account of the meeting at which the proposal to form a National League for Physical Education and Improvement first took a definite shape.

By J. B. ATKINS, London Editor of *The Manchester Guardian*.

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A PROPOSED LEAGUE.

THERE was never a time, probably, when the physical improvement of the people was a more red-hot subject than it is now. Until the last few months the matter was discussed by a few experts, mostly with a professional interest in it, who (with a few notable exceptions) frightened ordinary people away. The public avoids deserts, particularly deserts of figures. But at last the subject has become fit for human consumption, and one hears it discussed by persons whose interests are the current interests of the majority. A dinner which was given on Tuesday* night by a distinguished London physician at the Athenæum Club was a sign of the times. True the guests were nearly all experts, but they spoke with the pleasant consciousness of the great feeling which is at last pushing them on from behind. After the dinner, at which I had the pleasure of being present, the Bishop of Ripon spoke. And here I must mention an original plan of our host which is worthy of commendation and imitation. Before each guest paper and pencil were placed. Why? The reason grew on us slowly. At first we saw no particular reason for the paper and pencil, and left them alone. We wanted to do nothing but listen to the Bishop of Ripon, one of the half-dozen most accomplished speakers of the English language in the world. But before long the pencils were taken up to capture a fugitive thought or phrase for future reference. Thereupon the plan

* This is a misprint, the date was Monday, July 20th.—[L. B.]

had unconsciously begun to work. When a few notes had been made in this way the skeleton of a speech lay before everyone, and not to deliver it was to suffer from that acute disease which is epidemic in the House of Commons—"suppressed speech." Before the evening was over almost everyone had said something. For nearly three hours the discussion went on, at times two or three persons trying to talk at once, and when the end came the subject was left unwillingly. This surely was a triumph. And the opinions of such men as the Bishop, Lord Grey, Lord Glenesk, Sir Henry Craik (the president of the recent Scottish Commission on Physical Education), Sir Frederick Maurice, Mr. Maxse, and Professor Clifford Allbutt were worth hearing.

The Bishop dealt chiefly with the alleged decline of the birth-rate all over the Empire. He did not say it was proved; he said it was a proper and urgent subject for inquiry. Is the decline a sign of greater thrift and prudence? Is it due to the postponement of marriage? If so, he argued, there is nothing to say. But is it not possible that sterility increases with civilisation? If so, we face the fact that in this Imperial age the races which Imperialism wishes to see grow are dwindling or are stationary, while the very races which Imperialism wishes to see dwindle are increasing. As for our physique, the Bishop spoke chiefly of the rush to the towns, certainly a contributory cause to deterioration which has the advantage of impressing itself at once on the popular fancy. Another speaker hoped to see the conveyance of power by electricity make it possible to scatter our factories—the interesting view of the wholesome optimist which that speaker often declares himself to be. But he was prepared to go any lengths to repopulate the country, even the length of abandoning Free Trade, which he professed to cherish. Soon the discussion settled on food, and there was a point made here which did not appear in your recent articles on physical training—namely, that proper feeding is not merely the necessary precedent to proper physical exercise, but that physical exercise is the necessary precedent to the proper assimilation of food in the body. The cost of milk-feeding was a subject on which there

was astonishing disagreement. If the price named by one speaker was right, we find ourselves against a blank wall at once, for it is quite prohibitive for all but fairly well-to-do people. In any case the remark was disputed by no one "that it is a terrible and ironical reflection that a boy sent for misconduct to an industrial home has a far better chance of being brought up physically well than the boy of a poor but proud and respectable father." The comparison—uttered quite simply, without ironical intention—between our own slum children and "good healthy children from Poland" (observe, all who are interested one way or the other in alien immigration!) was rather a stinger. The end of the whole discussion was that we took away in our pockets for consideration a printed draft scheme for the formation of a National League for Physical Education. This scheme was hardly discussed at all, and is intended only as a starting-point for thought. The only point made—and it was clearly a just one—was that the nourishment of young children is primarily a woman's question. Therefore on the proposed council there ought to be at least as many women as men. The following is the scheme:—

PROPOSED NATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION.

DRAFT SCHEME FOR CONSIDERATION.

The objects of the proposed league are—

1. To co-ordinate the various agencies which are at present working independently of each other for the advancement of physical training.
2. To supply the information and assistance required to complete the work.

For these purposes it is proposed to unite all the bodies and individuals interested in the subject as members of one league, with an executive body consisting of president, vice-president, and council.

It has been suggested that possibly H.R.H. the Prince of

Wales, who has shown great interest in physical training, might become president.

Vice-presidents might be found amongst the members of both Houses of Legislature and others interested in the subject.

Several names were suggested :—

in the House of Lords :

in the House of Commons :

in the Law :

in the Education Department :

in the Medical Profession : and

in the Press : Editors of chief journals.

[In the original draft scheme a number of names were given, but they were not intended for publication, and appeared in *The Manchester Guardian* by mistake and without the consent of those named. They have therefore been omitted in this reprint.—L. B.]

Council: This must necessarily be very large, and out of it an executive council may be chosen. It should include clergymen, mayors of towns, chairmen of county councils, heads of schools of all sorts, town or country gymnasias, secretaries of cricket clubs, football clubs, cadet corps, boys' brigades, Church Brigade, lads' drill associations, rifle clubs, girls' clubs, lecture associations, temperance associations, and, last but not least, all editors of papers of every shade of political opinion, religious papers, papers for children, for boys, and for girls, and writers of books for children and youth.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION.

I.—A. Before the various bodies or individuals who are trying independently to promote physical education can work together each must know what the others are doing.

1. A list should therefore be prepared of all these bodies, giving very shortly their names, localities, numbers, kind of action, and names of secretaries.

2. A monthly or weekly paper should be started to give information regarding appointments or changes, and form a

means of communication. It might be called the "Physical Education News."

3. A larger publication might possibly be advantageous for longer papers on important topics. This might appear quarterly or monthly, and be called the "Physical Education Review."

B. The co-ordination of the various bodies might be of two kinds, (1) generic, and (2) territorial.

1. All bodies of the same kind, schools, continuation classes, gymnasias, cadets, and volunteers, might learn from the "News" what others engaged in the same pursuits were doing, so that any improvement made by one body could be adopted by others and arrangements made for occasional meetings or contests.

2. The different bodies in each district, *i.e.*, the schools, young men's associations, schools for cookery and housework, girls' clubs, rifle clubs, volunteers, &c., might learn to work together and to co-operate with those of adjacent districts.

II.—The information wanted to complete the work may be obtained partly by voluntary effort, but more easily by Royal Commissions on the Housing of the Poor, on Intemperance, on the Hours of Labour amongst Children. Some of these have already reported, and that which is now proposed on the Causes of Physical Deterioration generally may report especially in reference to the hours of work in schools, the accommodation for play, the time for play, and the physical training of children, not only by exercises but by games to develop their bodies, along with a certain proportion of drill to increase their powers of attention and prompt action. The assistance needed would require to be of many kinds, *e.g.*—

To have the law so altered that the children should have shorter hours of work, and that their work should not be continuously mental. Every hour of study should be shortened to 45 minutes, which I believe to be the rule in Germany, or 40 minutes, which I believe to be the rule in Sweden. During this 15 or 20 minutes in each hour the windows might be thrown open and the room ventilated while the children play or have exercises, or have drill outside.

To provide playgrounds and playrooms under cover for the children.

To provide the necessary instructors for physical exercises.

It might be requisite to provide meals at school at a low charge, and in some instances free, in order that children underfed at home might be able to do their lessons or exercises, or even to play properly.

The provision of cheap meals at schools would also be useful as affording larger opportunities for teaching cooking to the girls attending school than they could possibly have if no such meals were provided.

In cases where the mothers cooked badly the children might be allowed to buy food at school, for the purpose of taking home, at such a price as would fully remunerate the school and yet be cheaper for the mother than what she could prepare at home.

Classes for cookery amongst mothers might also be held, but in any case the girls at school, who will be the mothers of the next generation, will learn to cook.

Instruction should be given to all children, and especially to girls, regarding the nature and digestibility of foods and the general laws of hygiene, in relation especially to fresh air, clothing, abuse of stimulants (tea or alcohol), and avoidance of infection.

Provision requires to be made for places where girls and lads who have left school and are employed during the greater part of the day in various trades may spend their spare time with enjoyment and profit to themselves instead of wandering round the streets and getting into mischief.

For this purpose girls' clubs and boys' drill halls appear to be useful, but their use requires to be greatly extended. If proper arrangements were made for this purpose, the numerous premature marriages, which tend to increase a weakly population, might be lessened, and the infant mortality would be diminished by the greater ability of the mother to suckle her infant, and her increased knowledge of how to feed it afterwards.

It is obvious to carry out the various schemes already mentioned, as well as many others connected with physical

education, a great deal may be done by Royal Commissions and Acts of Parliament, but it is almost impossible that they can do it all, and in order to obtain physical improvement in all classes to the desired extent, all classes in the nation must co-operate, and for this reason it is desirable to form a National Physical Education League.—[LAUDER BRUNTON.]

J. B. A.



